DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 163 901 IR 006 080

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TITLE Governing and Financing Libraries in New York State: Position Paper on Finance and Governance.
INSTITUTION Governor's Commission on Libraries, Albany, N.Y.
PUB DATE Mar 78
NOTE 23p.; Position paper prepared for the New York State Governor's Conference on Libraries; Response prepared by John Cory

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Federal Aid; *Financial Support; Futures (of Society); *Governance; Incentive Grants; *Libraries; Library Administration; *Library Networks; *Regional Libraries; State Legislation
IDENTIFIERS *Access to Information; New York

ABSTRACT

In order to provide a structured program for improved access to New York state libraries, legislation is being developed to establish nine regional library systems funded completely by the state and including public, school, and reference and research library resources systems. Each regional system will be governed by a Board of Directors, appointed by the Education Commissioner from nominees proposed by the regional library system. Component systems will retain their own governance structure. Per capita funding may not be appropriate because the regional systems do not work directly with library users. Local sponsor incentive aid may also be ineffective since local governments are often incapable of increased contributions, but this is believed essential by the Commissioner's Committee on Library Development in achieving total access, the main focus of the system's development. The committee feels that the federal government also has a responsibility to provide its share of incentive aid, and that total access to all types of libraries will eventually require 25 percent funding by the federal government of inter-type library systems. (Author/MBR)

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News

New York State Governor's Conference on Libraries
State Capitol, Room 250, Albany. New York (518) 474-8826

GOVERNING AND FINANCING LIBRARIES IN NEW YORK STATE

Position Paper on
FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

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March 1978

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMAT ON CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

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The usual method of discussing systems and structures such as library services is to describe what is or what has been. I would like to change that slightly and discuss what will be. The governance and financing systems and structures that are described in the following pages relate to proposals, suggestions and ideas that are still taking shape. We don't know exactly what they will look like, but we do know they are coming soon and therefore are important to consider.

Rather than discuss all the possible alternative programs for future library service in New York State, I am going to describe those that I think are the most apt. Of course, I thereby risk being inaccurate, but at least it will provide a clear beginning for discussion. In any event, we have to conceive before we build, so let's begin.

* * * *

The time has come to establish a comprehensive program for library service throughout New York State. We have here in New York many of the finest libraries of the world --extensive collections such as those of the New York Public Library, specialized resource material such as the medical library at Strong Memorial Hospital at the University of Rochester, excellent university libraries, corporate libraries, and law libraries. Yet too many of these libraries are inaccessible to the vast majority of people, either because of purposeful limitations on access, because of distance from the library, because of ignorance of the library's resources, or because of combinations of those and other reasons. But the chief reason for inaccessibility to libraries is the lack of a structured program for providing access.

Libraries are valuable assets to communities, to universities, to corporations and foundations. They cost a lot of money to develop and maintain. They take a great deal of time to refine and fill out. We should always be sure that the books and other materials in our state's libraries are not destroyed through too casual an attitude toward library use. Yet failure to utilize materials that are available is in itself a kind of passive destruction of libraries, a wastefulness of non-use that has the same effect as theft or carelessness. The structures that we will be discussing here will enable all citizens of New York State to have real access to our valuable library materials while protecting and preserving the materials themselves. In this way, these structures will add to the value of our libraries while enriching our lives.

* * * *

If legislation now being developed is enacted, the Commissioner of Education will soon establish nine Regional Library Systems in the State of New York. The area of service for each of these nine Regional Systems will conform precisely to the area of service of each of the Reference and Research Library Resources Systems -- the "Three R's Systems" -- as presently constituted. The new Regional Library Systems will be the Western, the Rochester, the Central, the South Central, the North Country, the Capital District, the Southeastern, the Metro and the Long Island.

Each of the nine Regional Library Systems will accept as its constituent members three types of library systems within its area of service: the public library systems, the school library systems, and the "Three R's system."

The public library systems that will become part of the new Regional Library Systems are the presently active twenty-two public library systems. Their present areas of service all fit snugly into one or another of the areas of service of the proposed Regional Library Systems. There is no overlap. No adjustments need to be made. One Regional Library System -- the Metro -- will have four public library systems within its area -- the Westchester, the New York, the Queens, and the Brooklyn. One Regional System -- the Rochester -- will have only one public library system -- the Pioneer. The other Regional Library Systems will have either two or three public library systems.

The school library systems that will become part of the Regional Library Systems will either be city public school districts or BOCES that offer library services to their students and faculty. The districts of these school library systems do not always conform exactly to the areas of service of the proposed Regional Library Systems, so some adjustment will have to be made in the district lines. However, no public school libraries will be excluded from participation in a Regional Library System.

Each of the nine Three R's districts fits precisely into one of the proposed Regional Library Systems. The Three R's systems are more varied in terms of the nature of their component members than the public or school systems. Their libraries are more diverse, more specialized, more difficult to describe. This variety of type and operation makes the Three R's systems very valuable to the Regional Systems. It also gives the Three R's the responsibility of seeking out new member libraries who do not fit into the public library system or school library system but who would nevertheless make a valuable contribution

to the Regional Library System. And the State of New York must recognize this increased value and responsibility of the Three R's in making its funding decisions.

Each Regional Library System will be governed by a Board of Directors. This board will be made up of a fixed number of members, each of whom will serve for five years on a staggered schedule. They will serve without pay. They will be appointed by the Commissioner of Education. Certain members will be appointed from a list submitted by the Three R's Council in the region, certain members will be appointed from a list submitted jointly by the Boards of Trustees of the public library systems in the region, and certain members will be appointed from a list submitted jointly by the boards of education and BOCES in the region.

No limit will be put on the size of the lists to be submitted to the Commissioner. Therefore, if the regional groups can agree on the candidates for appointment, they will determine the Commissioner's choice by submitting the same number of names as there are vacancies to be filled. If they cannot agree on who should be appointed, then they can submit a list larger than the number of vacancies and let the Commissioner make the choice. Care will be taken that no one public library system or school system within a region can dominate the Board of Directors.

The Regional Board of Directors will not interfere in the operation of either the public, the school or the Three R's systems. That is not their function. Each of the component systems will retain the powers and duties it presently has. Each will retain its present governance structure.

Public library systems will continue to be governed by a variety of methods. The New York Public Library is governed by a board of trustees that is self-renewing, filling vacancies as they occur by a vote of the remaining board. The Suffolk County system, by contrast, is governed by a board designated by the several local library boards, which are themselves elected directly by the people of the districts. Other methods of election and selection by public officials exist. All of these means of governance have merits and defects, and perhaps changes should be made to improve them. But these changes will be made, if they are made, on a case by case basis. They will be essentially unrelated to the creation of the new Regional Library Systems.

The school libraries are governed by the local school boards and BOCES, which themselves are locally elected or designated by local elected officials. Furthermore, the day-to-day operations of the school libraries are determined very much by the school principals. There have been many complaints about the lack of professional school librarians in school libraries, and bills have been submitted to the Legislature mandating professional staffing. But here again, the creation of the Regional Library System has little to do with local governance of school libraries or even with changes that the Legislature may direct.

The Three R's are governed by a Board of Trustees chosen by the member institutions. There is no public participation in the selection of the Three R's boards. Without public participation on the Board of Trustees, the Three R's systems cannot be put in charge of the public and school libraries, even if that were otherwise desirable. Yet some have suggested this in proposed legislation. It is always questionable policy to appropriate money to privately selected groups -- questionable

but sometimes accepted as being necessary. But placing a privately selected group in charge of a publicly selected group's expenditure of public money is really not acceptable. The people have shown themselves quite capable of selecting directors of a public service, and capable, as well, of selecting overseers of those directors. The State should cooperate with private groups who have shown themselves willing to operate in the public interest, but the state cannot allow its own agencies to become subordinate to private organizations. The new Regional Library Systems wherein public and school libraries cooperate with the Three R's libraries of private origin is superior to the proposed notion that Three R's should take public and school libraries under their wing.

State funding of library services must be related to the governance of those services. The State must have some influence over the bodies that spend large amounts of State money. Therefore, this discussion of library funding will be keyed to those governance structures that have been described above.

Over the next few years, State funding of each of the component parts of the new State library structure will be increased dramatically so that the Regional Library Systems can organize themselves, make plans for their new operations and get their new services under way. That this new service enterprise begins at a time when State and local budgets are still in a state of semi-crisis is a difficulty that must be overcome.

Certainly the State must accept the full burden of funding the operations of the Regional Library Systems. These systems cross over so many county, municipal, school district and other local taxing unit

lines, that funding them from the local level would be labyrinthine and effectively impossible. Only the State can do this job properly.

Funding of the Regional Systems will mainly consist of basic grants to each of the Regional Library Systems so that they may hire staff, open offices and operate the mechanisms of intercommunication that the libraries of the region will use. Of course, the first steps of the Regional Board, which will be in charge of this money, will be to organize itself and to prepare a plan of service. This plan of service, once accepted by the Commissioner of Education, will determine the budget for the Regional Library Systems. In the meantime, start-up funds, appropriated somewhat in the dark as to what will be needed, should be large enough to allow the System to organize and function but not so large as to be wasteful.

In addition to basic grants for start-up operations, one might conceive of giving the Regional Library Systems per capita grants. However, the necessity of per capita funds for Regional Systems is not clear. The Regional Systems do not work directly with the library users but with the systems of public, school, and Three R's libraries. It is undemonstrated that operational costs will be determined by the number of people in the region. Per capita funds, it seems, would be better placed in the public and school library systems which deal directly with the public and which see their costs determined largely by the number of people they relate to.

The Three R's libraries also deal directly with their constituencies, but these libraries' user services are funded from other than direct State sources so that the State funding has gone to the inter-library cooperation aspect of the Three R's. The Three R's have

not been funded by the State to any sizeable amount. This funding of Three R's systems will be dramatically increased, especially in light of the new role they will be playing in the Regional Systems, that of seeking out and absorbing libraries within their respective regions that do not fit into the public or school systems but that might be an important addition to the total library service of the Regional Library System.

Eventually, it would seem appropriate that the budgets of the Three R's systems be examined in order to see where funding more carefully geared to need might be arranged for. It seems incredible that each of the nine Three R's Councils has exactly the same funding needs, and yet they are being funded exactly the same by the State. Per capita funding is not the proper method of funding Three R's since their work is not directly related to the population size of the region, and the constituencies of the several libraries of the Three R's systems would be hard to calculate due to the diverse nature of those libraries and the varying intensity of their use. A fair method of funding Three R's systems has not, in short, been developed as yet but should be.

Per capita funding is, of course, the basic method of funding public libraries. Public libraries deal directly with people, and the more people they have to deal with the more money they need. Per capita funding should be related to the actual population of the service area, not the number of card holders. Those libraries whose ratio of card holders to population is low can use the money not spent on direct service for outreach programs to bring the non-user population into more frequent contact with the library. We have to operate with the assumption that every person is a potential library user at some level.

If some persons don't know this, and thus don't come to the library, the library should make efforts to go and get them and bring them in. So the library with a low card-holder ratio can put its funds to good use on out-reach programs, and perhaps its plan of service should be required to show how it is doing that.

Although per capita funding is the basic method of funding public libraries, other funding methods must be employed to insure that adequate library service is available to all. If small communities are to have libraries at all, there are certain minimum standards and materials that those libraries must provide. Yet neither local funding nor per capita funding will be able to provide those minimal services. You can't provide half a set of encyclopedias to users of a small town library. Here again, only State funding can provide the kind of money required with per system grants.

The question of local sponsor incentive aid is a tricky one these days. Local budgets are in even more difficulty than that of the State, and to offer State aid based on increased funding by local governments is really to offer not much since the local government is frequently incapable of increasing its contribution. On the other hand, when State aid is offered to libraries the State should insure that it is spent for libraries. The device of accepting State aid for libraries, then reducing the local library budget in order to increase the local police budget, for example, cannot be tolerated. Strict "maintenance of effort" provisions must accompany all State aid to local library systems.

School libraries are funded through the local school budgets, which of course are aided by the State. Nevertheless, if the school libraries

are to be a part of a Regional Library System, a good deal of planning must take place within the school libraries, and since their budgets are already stretched to the breaking point, it seems only right and necessary that the State fund this planning.

In addition, as was mentioned before, there has been a good deal of controversy over the staffing of school libraries. Professional school librarians, accredited both in library science and in teaching, should ideally be in charge of every school library. But the cost of hiring so many school librarians, assuming that enough were available, plus the layoff problems of school systems with decreasing budgets, makes that ideal difficult to reach. If we are indeed to place a school librarian in every school library, perhaps State funding should be involved.

* * * *

We can have in New York State the finest library system in the world, but only if we decide to do it. I am not one of those who says that New York doesn't have to be first and best in everything. If we shouldn't be first, who should?

Certainly in libraries, where we have a head start, the people of this State, whose pride in being New Yorkers has always been a motivating spur to excellence, should feel that we have the best library system that we can devise. The system is for us to create and the time to begin is at hand.

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RESPONSE

The concept of response or reaction papers to the principal position papers at the 1978 Governor's Conference was successfully demonstrated at the first Governor's Library Conference in 1965. Reviewing the proceedings of that conference and reflecting on my present obligation to respond to Assemblyman Sullivan's challenging paper on library governance and finance, it appears that a brief comment may be appropriate on the intended role of the responder.

In my opinion, a reaction paper should accomplish several purposes: (1) to suggest a different point of view, either inherent in the professional background of the presenter and the responder (e. g. legislator and librarian) or arising from different social attitudes or political philosophies; (2) to assist the readers and discussants of the papers to understand different uses of words in different professional contexts; (3) to provide a "devil's advocacy" position that will help to provoke discussion and achieve understanding.

It is always best to begin with areas of agreement and there are major areas in which Assemblyman Sullivan and I find ourselves in substantial agreement, at least in principle, if not always in specifics. The first of these is a commitment to what I call "total access through local access." Assemblyman Sullivan refers to the need to develop patterns of library organization that "will enable all citizens of New York State to have real access to our valuable library materials while protecting and preserving the materials themselves." In 1970, the State Education Commissioner's Committee on Library Development, on which I served as Vice Chairman, made similar commitments which I am reasonably sure are favored by most professional

librarians and other educators and administrators. The report of that Committee which, incidentally, proposed in 1970 that the Governor of the State should be requested to convene a second Governor's Conference on Libraries, put the matter as follows: "The vision which the forward looking librarian holds today is of a single great network of interrelated resources which persons of all ages and all conditions, wherever in the State they may live, can freely call on to meet any library need they may have." It is significant that the Committee, in its deliberation and in its report, consciously and explicitly intended to look at library problems and solutions from the point of view of the library user and potential user, rather than to take a narrow technical point of view. Obviously, an aroused and concerned legislator, and Assemblyman Sullivan is clearly that, must be commended for taking the same view point and it is entirely consistent with his political responsibilities to his constituency that he does so.

A second position with which I find myself in agreement with Assemblyman Sullivan is that it is more fruitful to discuss what will be than it is to describe what is, or what has been. As a historian by background and a futurist by preference and a planner by duty, I certainly share Assemblyman Sullivan's desire to concentrate on the future. In passing, however, it should be noted that Mr. Sullivan and I would have substantial differences in our descriptions of what is or what has been. We might even disagree on what will be, since his natural and reasonable inclination is to deal with what will be as the result of State legislation, and I might be more anxious to establish an inter-active forum of all parties concerned from which to derive a picture of the optimum future. It is also likely that I would pitch my

image of the future at a more remote point than Mr. Sullivan did. Under funding proposals, he refers to "the next few years." I am generally anxious to know the long range options and probabilities so that I can at least zigzag toward them while not keeping my nose to the grindstone of the immediate future.

Another area of agreement is that this is the time to establish a comprehensive program; that this is the time to begin. Assemblyman Sullivan has given a valuable impetus to the process of directing immediate attention to the need for drastic review, evaluation and redirection of the thinking of all of us in relation to the funding and governance of library service in New York State.

Concerning areas of possible disagreement, and intentionally overemphasizing them for the purpose of provoking discussion, I would suggest that, in connection with our first point of agreement on "total access through local access," that we disagree on the relative importance of the reasons for the troublesome inaccessibility of many libraries to the vast majority of people. Mr. Sullivan mentions "ignorance of the library's resources," and stresses his belief that the chief reason for inaccessibility to libraries is the "lack of a structured program for providing access." Each of these charges requires discussion and, possibly rebuttal.

The first implication is that librarians may be responsible for purposeful limitations on access. I know of no librarian who is not dedicated to improving access and who is not frustrated by the fiscal limitations standing in the way of his achieving these goals and the policy decisions governing the situation. In other words, the blame falls with funding and governing officials and bodies, and not with any

resistance by librarians who, almost universally, come to their profession out of the deep desire to serve and to bring ideas together with people who might need or benefit from them. Clearly, therefore, there is an implied disagreement as to the sources of the blame for present inadequacies in access. Clearly, this disagreement is central to governance and financing.

My experience indicates that it is most centrally a problem of financing rather than governance. The Boards of institutions which include libraries as a part of their service paraphernalia (colleges, universities, schools, government departments, and corporations) are faced almost universally with the problems of funding an expensive service and have a feeling of obligation to concentrate these services on those beneficiaries that were intended by the donors and appropriators of the available funds. This often limits access, in an understandably proprietary way, to those who have a proper claim on the limited funds provided. The Commissioner's Committee on Library Development (1970) recognized two interrelated elements; (1) "in order to become a part of the statewide network, the local library outlet must accept the obligation to satisfy the needs of every individual. . . " and (2) "no library unit should be required to serve an expanded clientele or to assume expanded functions without adequate compensation." Reimbursement for services beyond the natural constituency of a particular type of library were assumed as coming from a sharing of financial resources by participating institutions, an infusion of state funds encouraging broader access; and the possibility of federal and philanthropic funding to accomplish this goal the goal of librarians and legislators alike. It is evident that the price may

be high but that if high enough, proprietary walls will crumble and nearly universal access can be accomplished.

Assemblyman Sullivan and I probably also disagree on the relative importance of governing and financing as elements of our futuristic approach to what will be. The truth is that governance of library systems in New York State as proposed by Assemblyman Sullivan is actually much closer to the present state of development of library governance than he supposes; and the present levels of financing are demonstrably less than he might wish to accomplish our common goals. For example, it is inherent in Assemblyman Sullivan's proposals for establishing "a structured program" for providing access, that it is necessary to establish a new pattern of Regional Library Systems because the existing 3 R's systems are privately financed and controlled, and cannot be trusted to reflect popular interest and needs nor to be allowed to spend public funds.

The 3 R's systems, by Commissioner's regulations, include as inherent, mandated elements each public library system in their respective regions and these public library systems serve, critically, as access points for the general public seeking information and materials that may be available only in other cooperating libraries who have agreed to share their resources, at least on a limited basis, by voluntarily joining the inter-type library system which is presently called 3 R's. Furthermore, many of the academic libraries participating in this improved type of cooperative system, are publicly supported colleges and universities and are, presumably, ultimately responsive to the needs of taxpayers and other constituencies which are so obviously of proper concern to the legislators.

The governance of the 3 R's system is considerably more representative and publicly responsive than Assemblyman Sullivan realizes. This is due, in large part, to the regulatory influence of the State Commissioner of Education, a public official, whose present rules and regulations bear a startling resemblance to the patterns proposed as legislative mandate by Assemblyman Sullivan.

The problem may be largely semantic. Nothing is sillier than the present designation of the regional systems as "3 R's" (Reference and Research Library Resources). Even within this misleading designation, it is important to note that "reference" (including basic everyday information requirements) is recognized, as well as "research" with latter's implication of elitism and esoteric scholarly considerations. Let us, by all means, embrace any terminology (including the term Regional Library Systems) which will clarify the great intended thrusts of the present inter-type library cooperative systems in New York State as being a democratizing instrument and a major necessary step toward achieving "total access through local access." It is true, as Assemblyman Sullivan points out, that schools and school libraries are lamentably absent from the present patterns of inter-type library cooperation. There is considerable room for argument as to the best way of involving these important local library outlets in sharing statewide library resources, and it should not be necessary to devitalize the present so-called 3 R's systems by removing the public library systems from this potentially effective structure and isolating the "private" libraries as the sole remaining elements of the present reference, research and library resources systems. In other words, there is substantial room for agreement on goals and for disagreement on alternative means of achieving these goals.

Offsetting the third general area of agreement, namely that now is the time to establish a comprehensive program, I would only, as an admitted historian and futurist, urge that we not ignore the past and the present in the planning for the future, but that we take time to consider the past and present, to evaluate critically the successes and failures which we can identify, and to build on the best features gleaned from our past experience.

Finally, there is an important point to which Assemblyman Sullivan refers, which requires clarification and intense and imaginative experimentation. I refer to his passing reference to "incentive aid" as a means of encouraging multi-type financing of inter-type libraries and other information agencies in order to achieve universal access to their resources. Assemblyman Sullivan refers only to the "tricky" question of local sponsor incentive aid. It was the considered and passionately held opinion of the members of the Commissioner's Committee on Library Development that various forms of "incentive aid" were essential in order to achieve "total access" given the tremendous variations in governance and financing of so many existing libraries. Foundations, public and private, have found great virtue in challenge or matching grants; the State government has done a great deal to encourage inter-type library cooperation, not only through the variety of incentives which it has advised but, most importantly, through the generosity of these incentives in recognition of the need to make it worthwhile to give up vested interests and parochial practices, and that it is necessary to provide adequate compensation for the democratizing process if it is to work.

It would be inappropriate to close a response paper on the issues of library governance and financing without a reference to the underdeveloped potential of federal financing of libraries. This Governor's Conference, after all, is consciously undertaken as a preliminary to a national "White House" conference and there is, lest we speak out, a danger of ignoring the responsibilities of the national government to provide its share of the costly incentive aid which we are discussing. The Commissioner's Committee on Library Development, to permit one final reference, proposes that the State should move toward the possible total support of local public library and school library services, with intermediate steps, as necessary, during which the support of public libraries would keep pace with the proportion of State Aid to public schools; and the same Committee recommended that total access to the resources of all types of libraries would require the eventual financing by the federal government of at least 25 percent of the total cost of effective inter-type library systems. It may be salutary to note that thirty years ago (1948), the American Library Association prepared "A National Plan for Public Library Service," a document intended to begin "now" on developing adequate governance and financing for libraries, or at least for public libraries. That document proposed that 60 percent of public library support come from local units, 25 percent from the State, and 15 percent from the federal government.

Whatever the presently desirable proportionate shares for funding a program of "total access through local access" involving multi-type libraries may be deemed appropriate and achievable, surely we can agree that the goal requires flexibility in governance and a carefully planned

financing plan involving all possible sources of funds necessary to achieve effective coverage of library systems.

* * *

March 30, 1978

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